

Emergent Adulthood: Review of Literature

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Acknowledgements

As a reflection of this institution's recognition of the deep history and culture of this island, the University of Tasmania wishes to acknowledge the muwinina people; the traditional owners and custodians of the land upon which this campus was built.

We acknowledge the contemporary Tasmanian Aboriginal community, who have survived invasion and dispossession, and continue to maintain their identity, culture and Indigenous rights.

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Acronyms

ABS	Australian Bureau of Statistics
DPAC	Department of Premier and Cabinet
DSS	Department of Social Services
NDIS	National Disability Insurance Scheme
NICE	National Institute for Health and Care Excellence
OECD	The Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development
UN	United Nations
UTAS	University of Tasmania
VET	Vocational Education and Training
YNOT	Youth Network of Tasmania

Remit and Approach

The Youth Network of Tasmania (YNOT) commissioned a review of relevant academic literature from the University of Tasmania to understand the general challenges and experiences of young people between the ages of 18-25 years in Tasmania today. The general aim is to identify transition points that may be applied to map current social policy and programs. Specifically, the review was to:

- Explore the concept of young adulthood as a period of human development, including physiological, cognitive, psychological and social development.
- Identify transition points in the context of social policy and programs.
- Consider existing models of transition used in Tasmania and Australia, and compare these to alternative (including international) models that consider young adulthood as a life stage.

The literature review was produced by University of Tasmania (UTAS) researchers led by the Tasmanian Behavioural Lab and supported by the Peter Underwood Centre. This work was informed by YNOT.

The review integrates literature from sociology, education, social policy, cultural studies, political science, economics, anthropology, criminology and behavioural economics. The authors identified themes and issues to discuss in the literature review in consultation with YNOT. A draft framework was shared with YNOT to confirm scope.

Snowballing refers to using the reference list of a paper or the citations to the paper to identify additional papers. YNOT referred to Andy Furlong's edited volume (2016 2nd ed) and we used references in this as a 'start set'. This approach was complemented by a database search. With the support of a research librarian at the University of Tasmania, the first author developed a concept table and a title, abstract, key word search of Scopus using search terms including "emerg* adulthood" or "young adult)" and different sub-themes such as, digital and literacy or physiological. Our inclusion criteria in the search terms focused on research between 2012-2023.

A critical analysis of the texts informed the synthesis of relevant literature which has been drawn from the disciplines mentioned above. We also direct emailed experts in child and adolescent psychiatry, paediatrics, and sports science for suggestions and conducted hand searches. Limitations largely relate to the necessity to distil a large, multi-disciplinary field of literature within a short timeframe.

1 Background and introduction

Transitions from adolescence to adulthood occur within biological, cultural, and social contexts. Today, young people living in advanced industrialised economies spend a longer period in education, and their career and life trajectories, unsurprisingly, reflect different experiences to their parents. Moreover, in the wake of the global pandemic, a flexible, globalised, digitised paradigm is reshaping the transitions associated with attaining adulthood that intersect with education, work, health, family and citizenship. It is timely, then, to review relevant literature on emergent adulthood and to consider its implications in Australian and Tasmanian contexts. In the following, we define the terms child, adolescent, youth, and adult, and explore the concept of an emergent adult.

Contemporary conceptualisations of emergent adulthood and models of transition are apparent in policy discourse and service system approaches within Australia, the UK, USA, Canada, and Scandinavian countries. Transition models and services are particularly evident in initiatives that support education-to-employment transitions. There are also transition models to support young adults who are vulnerable to social exclusion, such as people with a disability, refugees, or who experience mental health conditions.

Notwithstanding significant progress globally in advancing agendas of inclusion and equity, there are some features of social, cultural, and economic life that continue to be reproduced. Historical legacies of gender, race, and precarity shape many facets of adolescence and emergent adulthood. In some senses, the effects of legacies of structural and systemic inequalities have been amplified because of COVID-19 (Rudling et al. 2023). The subjective experience of being a young person moving towards adulthood can be regarded as “‘institutionally filtered’ by the respective welfare regimes, educational provisions, employment conditions and industrial relations and family structures” (Heinz, 2009, p6).

Technological and environmental developments are impacting emergent adults globally, injecting additional uncertainty into an already fast-changing social and cultural landscape. Artificial intelligence algorithms and digital technologies are becoming enmeshed in everyday life, study, and work. Such change has implications for young adults. Unpredictability due to large scale events such as climate change and COVID-19 may influence life-course decisions. Employment opportunities and career trajectories are rapidly shifting and guidance based on the experience of older adults may be less relevant.

Our analysis of the literature reveals a lack of coherent evidence on the applicability of existing models of transition. In the context of social policy and programs, transition points are largely determined by legal framings associated with the age of majority (18 years) or eligibility criteria related to a specific cohort profile. These structural underpinnings may be impeding a deeper engagement in the lived experiences of emergent adults, even as significant work is being done to support children and young people. There has been significant investment by the Tasmanian State Government in the Child and Youth Wellbeing Strategy, which spans from birth to 25 years, including an acknowledgement that 18–25-year-olds do require different approaches and supports with transitions (Department of Premier and Cabinet (DPAC) 2021). It is essential that these initiatives continue to be informed from a strong evidence base. Facilitating effective coordination of services that span education, welfare, employment, and community services may require a stronger nexus between research, policy, and practice. Further,

engagement with emergent adults themselves is essential to understanding and responding to the new dynamic.

The aim of this literature review is to describe what is known about emergent adulthood in contemporary research. Emergent adulthood is a concept that intersects disciplines. We define emergent adulthood as a period of human development that includes physiological, cognitive, and social aspects. We examine the literature in relation to established legal, and material and economic markers of adulthood and independence. We then present the literature on transition models and the sociocultural influences on emergent adulthood and adulthood.

Key terms

In the following, we establish our definitions of child, adolescent, youth, and adult followed by a summary of the definitions and debates of the life phase of emergent adulthood.

1.1 Child

Around the world, a child is someone who is under 18 years of age (United Nations 1990). Article 1 of the United Nations *Convention on the Rights of the Child* outlines a child as someone who is “below the age of eighteen years unless under the law applicable to the child, majority is attained earlier.” In some countries, the age of majority occurs later than 18 (Matthews 2000. See section 3). The *Convention on the Rights of the Child* further outlines the additional rights and protections afforded to children in recognition of their developmental vulnerability when compared with adults (United Nations 1990; Landsdown & Vaghri 2022).

1.2 Adolescent

There is no universally accepted definition of adolescence. However, the United Nations International Children’s Emergency Fund recognises adolescence as occurring between the ages of 10 and 19 (UNICEF 2022). Adolescence is a period of significant physical and psychosocial change and is a developmental transition point between childhood and adulthood that encompasses the onset of puberty and sexual maturity. Although not described as children, the increased likelihood of risk taking for this group mean they are also developmentally vulnerable and warrant the same legislative protection offered to children under the *Convention on the Rights of the Child* (United Nations 1990).

1.3 Youth

The term ‘youth’ is used widely to refer to those who are ‘non-adult’ (Côté 2014). This can include both children and adolescents. Furlong (2009) describes the period of youth as “a time in which people reflect on the views of their parents and develop values and beliefs that are congruent with emerging adult identities” (p. 374). Seaton (2012) defines youth as a process of becoming an adult. Differences of definition as well as cultural perspectives mean that, around the world, the upper and lower ends of youth varies.

Entity/Instrument/ Organization	Age	Reference
UN Secretariat/UNESCO/ILO	Youth: 15-24	UN Instruments, Statistics
UN Habitat (Youth Fund)	Youth 15-32	Agenda 21 ⁷
UNICEF/WHO/UNFPA	Adolescent: 10-19, Young People: 10-24, Youth: 15-24	UNFPA ⁸
UNICEF /The Convention on Rights of the Child	Child until 18	UNICEF ⁹
The African Youth Charter	Youth: 15-35	African Union, 2006 ¹⁰

Figure 1 Around the world, the lower age limit of youth encapsulates part of what could be described as childhood or adolescence. However, the upper limit extends well beyond the age of majority. Table sourced from United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UNDESA) (no year). Definition of Youth. Accessed March 16 2023, via: <https://www.un.org/esa/socdev/documents/youth/fact-sheets/youth-definition.pdf>.

1.4 Adult

The definition of adult is also contested (Mary 2014; Arnett 2000; Hamilton 2016), with some scholars suggesting adulthood commences from 30 years of age onwards (Arnett 2000). This is, in part, because the notion of adulthood is culturally bound and changes around the world (Tagliabue et al. 2016; Rankin & Kenyon 2008). Legally, in Australia, adulthood occurs when an individual reaches the age of majority (Matthews 2000).

Adulthood is also measured by reaching developmental milestones. Skehan & Davis (2017) state that “the definition of mature adulthood is less defined by chronological age and more appropriately defined by developmental milestones” (p.177). In summary of the extant literature, Tagliabue et al. (2016) advise seven criteria of adulthood: psychological and physical independence, interdependence (such as long-term relationships), role transitions (commencing a career), norm compliance (reduction in risk taking or experimental behaviour), biological transitions, chronological transitions (such as reaching the age of majority), and enhanced family capacity (managing a household, or caring roles) (p. 376). Other commonly cited markers of adulthood include the completion of school and transition to permanent work (Mary 2014; Arnett 2000), financial independence (Mary 2014; Arnett 2000; Hamilton 2016), entering marriage or a serious relationship (Patton et al. 2018; Mary 2014, Halfon et al. 2018), and starting a family (Patton et al. 2018; Arnett 2000; Mary 2014).

1.5 Emergent adult

Emergent adulthood is increasingly recognised as a distinct life phase and forms the focus of this literature review. This phase occurs roughly from late adolescence and for the first few years following reaching the age of majority (Arnett 2000), although there is some disagreement around the age period of emergent adulthood, with Arnett (2000) suggesting 18-25, and later suggesting 18-29 (Arnett et al. 2014).

The life-phase of 'emergent adulthood' is a response to "growing evidence [that] suggests that an individual at the end of adolescence cannot be considered to be an adult when using physical, physiological, intellectual, social, emotional, and behavioral measures" (Hochberg & Konner 2020, p.1) and in recognition that this group need age-appropriate support while they are still learning and developing (Hochberg & Konner 2020, p.1). While the brain may be adult size at the completion of puberty, "brain maturation continues beyond adolescence, extending until around the age 25 years..." (Hochberg & Konner 2019, p.2). Emergent adulthood, then, "is not just a sociological transition period but a biological life-history phase" (Hochberg & Konner 2019, p. 2).

Marked by significant change and personal exploration, this period of life is described as 'volitional' (Arnett 2000; Wood et al. 2018) and one defined by increases in independence that occur simultaneously to decreases in support structures, such as parents and carers, or stable school or employment (Wood et al. 2018). Tagliabue et al. (2016) describe emergent adulthood as a phase of ambivalence, instability, possibility, and self-focus.

Described as a 'fuzzy' time (Pollock 2008), research suggests that "emerging adults do not see themselves as adolescents, but many of them also do not see themselves entirely as adults" (Arnett 2000, p. 471). Emergent adults disagree with adults on the defining characteristics of adulthood (Mary 2014; Arnett 2000; Hamilton 2016) and "young people's conception of adulthood, and their experience of becoming adults, bears little resemblance to the legal construction of adulthood as status" (Hamilton 2016, p. 96. See further Rankin & Kenyon 2008). Hamilton (2016) observes:

Although they formally attain adult status upon reaching the legal age of majority, that formal marker has remarkably little meaning in young people's lives. What is now socially meaningful is the gradual attainment of the various indicia of adulthood-responsibility for oneself, autonomous decision making, and financial self-sufficiency.
(p. 96)

In continuation of this, emergent adults suggest following criteria for adulthood: accepting responsibility for oneself, making independent decisions, and attaining financial independence (Hamilton 2016). These phases were perceived by emergent adults to be reached gradually, and in no clear or linear fashion (Hamilton 2016). In the following section, we highlight the psychological and physical development of emergent adults.

1.5.1 Psychological development throughout emergent adulthood

Throughout adolescence and into the third decade of life, the brain undergoes significant functional and morphological change (Arain et al. 2013; Ethridge et al. 2017; Patton et al. 2018). The period of emergent adulthood is marked by ongoing brain maturation (Hochberg & Konner 2020) and molecular, physiological and behavioural adjustments that may affect health, growth, and development (Patton et al. 2018, p. 458).

The shift from childhood to adulthood is marked by significant change, and Talburt & Lesko (2012) observe "emerging adults move from dependence to mutual responsibility, explore romantic and career roles and opportunities" (p.16) within the context of "often volatile, emotional, neurodevelopmental, and social development" (Wood et al. 2018, p. 124). Change and instability can lead to compounding

pressures and increase the vulnerability of emergent adults to both stress and psychological distress (Matud et al. 2020).

Up until around the age of 24, the brain has high levels of neuroplasticity which allows the individual to both “learn and adapt in order to acquire independence; however, plasticity also increases an individual’s vulnerability toward making improper decisions...” (Arain et al. 2013, p. 451). This, in part, is because the brain’s neurocircuitry is still under construction, “making it difficult to think critically and rationally before making complex decisions” (Arain et al. 2013, p. 451).

The malleability of the emerging adult brain (Dalton & Cassidy 2021) is supported by “evidence...that an individual at the end of adolescence cannot be considered to be an adult when using physical, physiological, intellectual, social, emotional, and behavioural measures.” (Hochberg & Konner 2019, p. 1). According to Arain et al. (2013, p.457), “cognitive differences between adolescents and adults suggest that the adultification of youths is deleterious for youths whose brains have not fully matured.” Related to this is the significance of emotions during the emergent adult phase. Arnett and Mitra (2018) offer an emotions-based model of emergent adulthood, with the dimensions: “identity explorations, self-focus, feeling-in-between, instability, and possibilities/optimism” (p. 412). These factors tend to be more pronounced during the emergent adult phase than in adolescence or adulthood (Arnett & Mitra 2018).

Brain maturation is influenced by many factors, including environmental, nutritional, and hereditary aspects (Arain et al. 2013). Brain maturation is further affected by “physical, mental, economical, and psychological stress; drug abuse (caffeine, nicotine, and alcohol); and sex hormones including estrogen, progesterone, and testosterone...” (Arain et al. 2013, p. 450). Exposure to stressors, such as sexual abuse or harsh corporal punishment (including punishment within the family environment), may detrimentally affect development of the brain (Tomoda et al. 2009; Schubert et al. 2017).

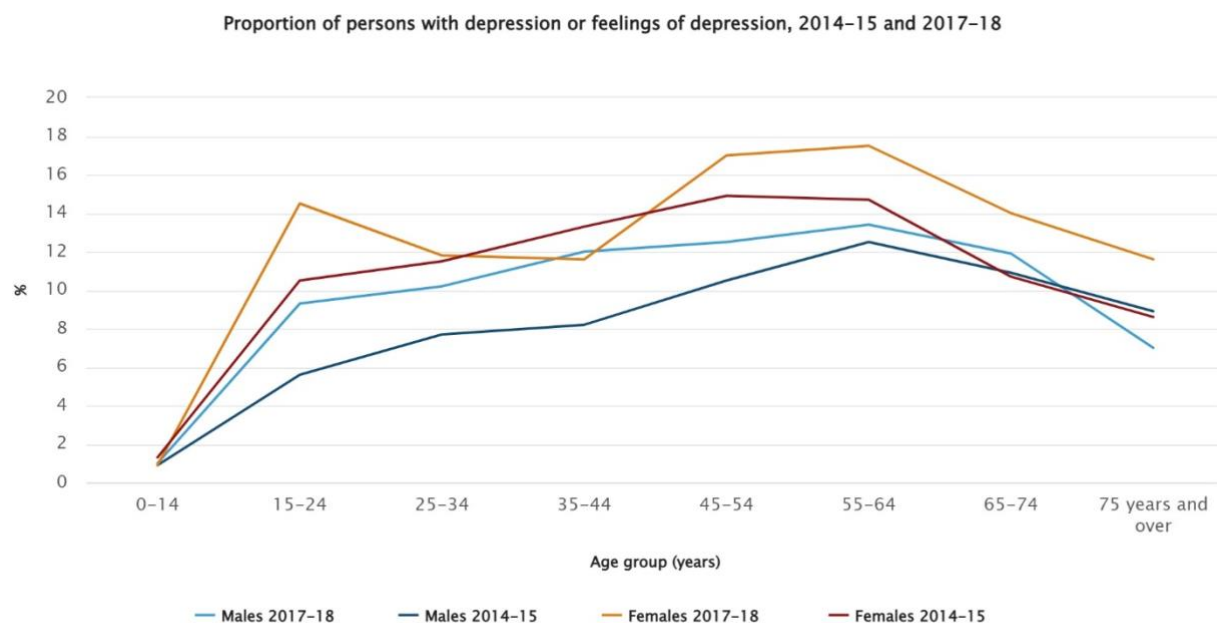
The behavioural implications of cognitive development during emergent adulthood are discussed in more detail in section 2 below. In the following, we highlight the importance of resilience and wellbeing, independent decision making, and mental health to emergent adults.

Mental health

It is during emergent adulthood that acute and chronic mental health concerns tend to develop (Solmi et al. 2021), such as depression (Schubert et al. 2017). In a systematic review of the literature, Schubert et al. (2017) identified that the “incidence of...[depression] rises rapidly during adolescence and early adulthood” (Schubert et al. 2017). This trend is also reflected in 2017/18 data from the Australian Bureau of Statistics (see figure 2 below). It should be noted that although depression in adolescence is prevalent, it is not considered an expected part of human development and can be traced to a range of factors. These include genetic predisposition (Xia & Yao 2015); environmental stressors such as family conflict, academic pressures, and peer relationships (Hankin et al. 2015); changes to brain chemistry (Steingard et al. 2000), and hormone changes (Albert & Benkelfat 2013). In addition, risk factors such as trauma or abuse can increase the likelihood of developing depression in adolescence (Kaufman et al.

2006). Importantly, without adequate support, adolescents experiencing acute or chronic mental health challenges, such as depression, have increased likelihood of adult suicidality (Johnson et al. 2018).

Multiple economic and social stressors can contribute to poor mental health or poor decision making and risk taking, such as using substances, to ‘escape’ pressures. For instance, emotional instability is associated with problematic internet use (Dalton & Cassidy 2021; Stockdale & Coyne 2020). Further, some research shows that the stress associated with moving out of home and on to tertiary residential housing (such as a university college) is linked with increases in alcohol consumption and potential misuse (Cohen-Gilbert et al. 2022).



Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics, Mental health 2017-18 financial year

Figure 2 <https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/health/mental-health/mental-health/2017-18>

Resilience

Resilience can be broadly understood as behaviour patterns that are indicative of positive adaptation in response to risk or adversity. An individual’s ability to exhibit resilient behaviour contributes to their overall sense of wellbeing (Ong et al. 2009). Resilience is an essential life skill for the period of emergent adulthood, where adaptation to change is a constant feature (Arnett 2000; Burt & Paysnick 2012; Hochberg & Konner 2019). Balancing work, life, relationships, health, and wellbeing can be a challenge for emergent adults (White & Wyn 2004) and stressors, such as relationship breakups, tertiary study constraints, or insecure work or housing, contribute to negative wellbeing (White & Wyn 2004).

Resilience can be viewed more generally as ‘coping.’ Leipold et al. (2019), describe coping as “efforts to manage demands that individuals appraise as exceeding their own resources (p. 13). In the transition from adolescence to adulthood, individuals learn skills around resilience and coping, and Leipold et al. (2019) identify three general types of resilient coping in the transition from adolescence to early adulthood: “problem-focused coping, social support-seeking, and meaning-focused coping” (p.12).

Young people draw on each of these methods of coping to manage stress and contribute towards wellbeing and there is scope to explicitly teach young people these skills (Leipold et al. 2019). Nestled in resilience and wellbeing is goalsetting. Schoon & Heckhausen (2019) identify the dynamics necessary for goal pursuit as “the tendency to persist in the face of adversity, the capacity to disengage from futile goals, or to re-engage when the conditions are favourable” (p. 137).

Independent decision making

The capacity of emergent adults to exercise self-control and self-regulation is still developing throughout both adolescence and the transition to adulthood (McClelland et al. 2018). Burt et al. (2014) suggest that self-control abilities are not yet established by the second decade of life. However, emergent adulthood is also a key time of identity formation and development of talent, as well as a period of risk taking and novelty seeking (Arain et al. 2013; Bjork et al. 2012). During this phase, there is a propensity towards making decisions based on emotions and, as a result, a higher likelihood of sensation seeking (Arain et al. 2013; Bjork et al. 2012). Alongside these tendencies, the emergent adulthood life phase is a time when an individual establishes agency and independence in decision making. Schoon & Heckhausen (2019) describe individual agency as “intentional action” which includes the “capability to set goals (i.e., intention), plan their pursuit and attainment in the future (i.e., action planning; foresight), and allow behaviour to be guided by goal pursuit (i.e., action-regulation)” (p. 137). Goalsetting tends to reflect the social group of the individual with, for example, career pursuits commonly aligned with those of respected peers or trusted adults (Schoon & Heckhausen 2019).

The ability of an emergent adult to exercise independent decision making is related to the development of life skills. Literature suggests that emergent adults with ‘helicopter parents’ who over-protect their children have lower self-efficacy in terms of life skills and independent decision making (Güçlü et al. 2022) when compared with one study of emergent adults who had lived in foster care which found that the sampled cohort felt they had strong self-determination skills (Häggman-Laitila et al. 2019). In a study into resilience and wellbeing of tertiary students, Reed et al. (2016), found that helicopter parenting negatively affected wellbeing and reduced life satisfaction and self-efficacy.

Maintaining positive relationships

Relationships are key to fostering a sense of belonging, which in turn, influences a person’s sense of wellbeing (Wyn et al. 2019; White & Wyn 2004). Relationships are the backdrop to common measurements of transition, such as from school-to-employment (Wyn et al. 2019). According to Granger et al. (2020), “adolescents who experience strong bonds and social support from their parents are more likely to reciprocate this behaviour with their peers” (p. 94). Positive relationships with peers, family, and intimate partners are especially important to the health and wellbeing of emergent adults (Granger et al. 2020, p. 90). Young people identify positive relationships as a safeguard against adverse mental health concerns (White & Wyn 2004). As might be expected, three of the most important relationships during emergent adulthood are those with parents, friends, and intimate partners, with parents and emergent adults having reciprocal effects on the wellbeing of each other (Knoester 2003).

Technological change is influencing communication patterns. The literature on emergent adults’ use of dating apps suggests that users have diverse motivations to use these media besides simply ‘hooking up’ (Sumter et al. 2017). For example, a study by Sumter et al. (2017) of Tinder suggested it was being used as a multifunctional tool that satisfied various needs among emergent adults. More negatively,

technology-assisted sexual harassment, objectification and self-objectification are emerging issues in the new world of social interaction on social networking and dating apps. A critical review of the literature on the impacts of sexual media exposure on dating and sexual violence attitudes and behaviour suggests the need for media literacy programs (Rodenhizer and Edwards 2019; Sawyer et al. 2018).

1.5.2 Physical development throughout emergent adulthood

Safe and supportive families, safe and supportive schools, together with positive and supportive peers are crucial to helping young people develop to their full potential and remain healthy in the transition to adulthood (Viner et al 2012). The physical changes that start in puberty last until the third decade of life, and this period “can be considered a sensitive phase, during which the quality of the physical, nutritional and social environments may change trajectories of health and development into later life” (Patton et al. 2018, p. 458).

Emergent adults tend to be relatively healthy, being both at the peak of their fitness and having lower rates of disease when compared with older age groups (Tanner & Arnett 2009). However, the tendency for risk taking behaviours overexpose emergent adults to danger and injury, potentially with long-term consequences (Tanner & Arnett 2009). For example, sexual and reproductive health are important aspects of health management for emergent adults that need to be managed within the context of both fecundity and risk-taking behaviours (Mugisha 2009). Another challenge is maintaining fitness, with young people having trouble balancing work and relationships with maintaining their ideal of physical health (White & Wyn 2004). Therefore, despite emergent adults being in peak physical strength and resilience, evolving capabilities for perception and critical thinking mean there are commonly high mortality rates for the 15-24 age group (Arain et al. 2013, p. 454).



2 Behavioural insights into emergent adulthood

Behavioural science has contributed significantly to our understanding of emergent adulthood. We now overview the findings of behavioural science regarding the psychology of emergent adults and consequences for their behaviour. Behavioural insights are psychological facts about the typical cognition (perception, memory, processing, retrieval) and resulting behaviour (decisions, automated responses, physiological processes) of humans. Behavioural insights are generated as empirical data collected through scientific methods including controlled experiments, psychometric questionnaires, and psychophysiological studies (Coate & Hoffmann 2022).

Behavioural science generally explains human cognition and behaviour as the result of two factors: (1) the influence of the situation a human decision maker is in, and (2) the influence of the decision maker's individual characteristics that persistently shape their unique and distinct responses to these situations (Hoffmann forthcoming publication 2024). Both are results of physiological brain development to maturity, which we begin our discussion with. We then describe the individual difference and situational characteristics that the behavioural literature has associated with emergent adults.

2.1 Emergent adulthood decision processes

Social and economic behaviour is based on cognitive and moral development, which, in turn, depends on brain development. Neuroscience, in particular brain imaging research, shows that emergent adulthood is a period of profound development of the brain (Blakemore 2012; Dumontheil 2016; Steinberg 2016). This period is uniquely characterised by developmental plasticity or malleability, where anatomic brain changes (new cells and circuits) from learning have permanent effects. Learning and experience (good or bad) in emergent adulthood therefore shape life outcomes.

Throughout adolescence and into emergent adulthood, the brain develops more powerful cognition than during childhood. Experiments show that the ability to act rationally, where individuals identify the best actions based on consistent preferences, increases during adolescence (Sutter et al. 2019).

Research also suggests that this developmental period is associated with continued but uneven development of different human brain regions: Neural reward (limbic) centres develop at a faster pace than those associated with judgment, decision making and impulse control (prefrontal cortex). This provides a potential explanation for behaviours that rise exponentially during adolescence and in the phase of emergent adulthood, including violence, drug abuse and STDs (Dahl 2004; Casey et al. 2008; Dumontheil 2016). This cohort are more attuned to reward seeking but also to emotions and stress.

Throughout adolescence and into emergent adulthood, there are significant increases in the connectivity between different brain regions, allowing for more powerful social cognition – making sense of how people behave towards and interact with others. Sensitivity to social signals, to other's mental states, to peer pressure and social evaluation rise during this period (Rozenhizer et al. 2019; Patton et al. 2018; Primack et al. 2017; Tanti et al. 2011).

2.2 Individual differences during emergent adulthood

Individual differences are those personal characteristics that make a person feel, think and act consistently over time but uniquely, distinct from others. These individual psychological tendencies

result from the interaction of genetic, physiological, hormonal and environmental influences and commonly include one's preferences, personality and values.

Economic preferences describe how a person values different possible economic outcomes they and others may receive (Falk et al. 2018). Experimental economics research on the effects of age and development on economic preferences has recently proliferated. It provides insights into how emerging adults compare with children and adults respectively (see Sutter et al. 2019 for a survey and references therein). These results show that economic preferences develop from childhood to adulthood in predictable ways.

Patience, or future orientation, rises towards adulthood. It is the ability to delay gratification, curb impulses and discount future outcomes less. It is associated with emerging adults' positive health, educational attainment and social outcomes that persist in later years. Risk preference, i.e., forsaking smaller sure gains for greater uncertain ones, is associated with detrimental social behaviour but has been found to temper during childhood and to remain relatively stable from early adolescence onwards (Samek et al. 2021).

Social preferences describe how a person values the outcomes of others both in the absolute sense (altruism) and compared to oneself (fairness). They develop in two ways: compared to children, adolescents increasingly become more pro-social (cooperative, altruistic and fair), but also more parochial in targeting their kindness selectively towards others like them (e.g., Hoffmann & Tee 2006). They also learn to be more strategically sophisticated, less likely to accept unfairness, more reciprocal but also more able to act opportunistically. This ability stems from the greater development of abstract reasoning centres in the brain.

The evidence further shows that many economic preferences, such as competitiveness, risk and time preference (and social preferences to a lesser extent), differ between adolescents of different genders (girls are less competitive and risk seeking but more altruistic) and are strongly correlated with those of an individual's parents. In addition, economic preferences are related to an individual's socio-economic background in systematic ways (lower socio-economic status is associated with greater risk taking, lesser competitiveness, lower social preferences and lower patience (Dohmen et al. 2011).

Personality, the internal traits that determine a person's typical but unique patterns of feeling, thought and behaviour, changes predictably over childhood towards adulthood (see Ashton 2022, chapter 4). HEXACO, also known as the Big-6, is a widely-used personality inventory that identifies six personality traits: honesty-humility, emotionality, extraversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness and openness to experience (Ashton & Lee 2009). Among the Big-6 factors, interestingly, different sub-components of the six can change in different directions into adulthood. Honesty-humility shows the greatest development-related change. It decreases over the teenage years before rising again through adulthood. In terms of emotionality, anxiety is relatively high during adolescence and starts to decrease only from young adulthood while sentimentality increases. The teenage years are associated with a rise in extraversion: Self-esteem, boldness and sociability rise during adolescence and adulthood, but the latter falls off in the 20s. Openness to change shows a U-shaped dip during adolescence: Unconventionality, creativity and inquisitiveness temporarily fall in the mid to late teens before rising throughout adulthood. Conscientiousness develops during the teens only in terms of impulse control – perfectionism remains stable, as does the final Big-6 factor, agreeableness.

Values and attitudes are individual differences between people that predictably change over one's lifetime. Values, the high-level evaluations of abstract ideas, first develop with cognitive functioning and independence of a young person before changing predictably over life. Recent research suggests that this change is essentially linear – getting older (from childhood) causes steady, incremental rises or falls in different kinds of values (Borg 2022). Emergent adulthood is therefore merely one of several stages along this trajectory. In terms of Schwartz's (2012) universal human value system, as they get older people increasingly value conservation – tradition, conformity and security. Conversely, values such as power, achievement, hedonism and stimulation fall in importance over life. Only self-transcendence (universalism and benevolence) remain stable as a person develops over age.

2.3 Situational factors during emergent adulthood

In addition to individual influences, emergent adult behaviour is shaped by the situations that characterise and differentiate the typical experiences of this age group. One is social identity – the social groups that a person identifies with and is identified with by others. Multiple social identities have importance at different times of life – from those based on family, friendship or occupational groups to those based on age, gender, ethnicity, nationality, religion or values.

Social identity has several important effects on behaviour. First, humans have an innate need to associate with groups that, depending on their status, are an important source of self-esteem and belonging that enhance individual well-being and success. Second, peer groups influence the values, attitudes and behaviours individual members adopt through socialisation. Third, people tend to favour others who are perceived to be ingroup members to those from an outgroup. Finally, because groups are associated with stereotypes, group members are treated according to these as they interact with others.

Adolescence is a critical period for the development of social identity (Tanti et al. 2011). We have already seen above that the capacity for social cognition rises due to brain development. Growing autonomy raises not only self-identity (who am I?) but also social identity (where do I belong?) as central questions to be solved during this time. Identity discontinuity from changing educational or work environments in emergent adulthood exacerbate this issue. The need to belong has several effects on emergent adult cognition. Research shows this age group has greater levels of attachment, perceived similarity, influence by, identification with and favouritism towards the ingroup. The peer group provides a bridge in the transition from parental dependence to autonomy.

Emerging adults tend to identify most with peer groups or age-related social identities. Their peer group belonging falls after reaching adulthood (Brown et al. 1986). This attachment has specific consequences. First, highly visible youth-related identity (e.g., based on lifestyle or fashion tastes) also exposes group member to entrenched stereotypes. Harmful youth stereotypes include risk taking, irresponsibility, trouble, rebelliousness and delinquency (Bessant 2008). In addition to unfair denial of opportunities this may cause, research suggests negative emotional and psychological consequences of perceived discrimination (Schmitt et al. 2014). Furthermore, adolescent peer groups, in society and the economy, are less endowed with the material and social capital to confer their members benefits and mutual support to the same extent as adult social groups.

The transition towards personal autonomy over adolescence creates the potential of cognitive overload for many young people. Schwartz (2004) argues that the sheer volume of choice alternatives and

information have become unmanageable for the decision maker, leading to stress and anxiety when (self-)expectations to attain the best outcomes cannot be fulfilled. This is especially true for adolescents whose greater autonomy and responsibility produces overload while lacking the experience and acquired intuitions that help adults manage this complexity (Schwartz 2004).

Some authors caution against attributing the differences between adolescent and adult thinking and behaviour solely to continuing brain development. Moshman (2021) argues that adolescence has been artificially extended into the late teens as a result of social processes. As a result, this age is associated with lacking rights and responsibilities to take control of their own lives. Besant (2008) argues that if the brain development accounts are correct then the conclusion should be to allow young people the experiences and opportunities to support this development.

The concept of emergent adulthood as distinct from other age-based life phases becomes especially important when considered in connection with systemic, social, and cultural environments that young people are obliged to navigate. The following sections examine these elements and associated transition models for emergent adults, with particular focus on local contexts.



Section summary

This section discussed the role of behavioural science in understanding emergent adulthood. Human cognition and behaviour are influenced by two factors: the situation that a person is in and their individual characteristics. Both factors are shaped by physiological brain development that occurs during adolescence and early adulthood.

During this period, the brain undergoes profound development that leads to the emergence of more powerful cognition and the ability to act rationally, where individuals identify the best actions based on consistent preferences. However, brain development during adolescence is uneven, with neural reward centres developing faster than those associated with judgment, decision making, and impulse control. This may explain behaviours that rise exponentially during adolescence, such as violence, drug abuse, and STDs.

Personality traits such as honesty-humility, emotionality, and extraversion can change in different directions into adulthood. Honesty-humility decreases over the teenage years before rising again through adulthood. Anxiety is relatively high during adolescence and starts to decrease only from young adulthood while sentimentality increases. The teenage years are associated with a rise in extraversion: Self-esteem, boldness, and sociability rise during adolescence. Overall, section 2 emphasises the importance of behavioural insights in understanding emergent adults and their behaviour, providing valuable information about the cognitive and moral development that occurs during this transitional period, as well as the individual differences and situational characteristics that shape emergent adults' behaviour.

Overall, behavioural insights into emergent adulthood result in the following conclusions:

- The human brain develops unevenly during adolescence, where social and abstract thinking improve while impulse control lags behind.
- As the final stage before adulthood, the late teens are a crucial “age of opportunity” where the brain is malleable and the scene gets set for future economic, health and social outcomes. Parental and socio-economic background has a powerful and lasting influence in this stage.
- Emergent adults are psychologically different to adults to an extent, but these differences are best viewed as one in successive stages of human development rather than as idiosyncrasies of emergent adults.
- Situational factors of emergent adults, in their typical social roles and economic positions, are powerful drivers of their current as well as future behaviour.

3 Legal, material, and economic markers of adulthood

As discussed in the previous section, the concepts of youth and adulthood tend to be culturally and legally defined in relationship to key transition points – school to work, school to university, home to independent living, single to partnered (Wood et al. 2018; Mary 2014; Arnett 2000). However, this may not capture the actual capacities and needs of individuals:

The law says at what age an individual acquires legal capacity to make contracts, have sexual intercourse, consent to medical procedures, marry, consume legal drugs, drive a motor vehicle, and participate in elections. These changes in legal personality are not catalysed by merit or personal characteristics, but by the expiry of a span of time from each individual's date of birth. The ages at which law sets these capacities is informed by historical habits, changing perceptions of children, and by other factors such as social climate, realpolitik and economics. Yet, since individual human beings develop at different rates – physically, intellectually, psychologically and emotionally – it is clear that the law's conferral of rights and imposition of responsibilities occurs at inappropriate times for many individuals. (Matthews 2000, p. 27).

In the excerpt above, Matthews (2000) emphasises that while change is a constant state for emergent adults, the timing and sequencing of traditional markers of adulthood are not universally applicable. While the age of majority is a moment of change in legal status, Matthews (2000) draws attention to the reality that, at that point, many emergent adults may be ill equipped for adulthood. In this section, we discuss emergent adulthood in relation to legal, social, and material transition points.

3.1 The age of majority

The age of majority is a legal transition from child to adult. Adulthood as a legal construct (Hamilton 2016; Talburt & Lesko 2012) occurs when an individual reaches the age of majority (Hamilton 2016). The age of majority represents the moment in time when an individual gains legal, economic, and social expectations and responsibilities commensurate with adulthood (Hamilton 2016). This is exemplified by an adults' ability to sign contracts, vote in government elections, drink alcohol, smoke tobacco or vape, and be held legally accountable as an adult for conduct.

This legal change also carries a shift in social engagement and norms, with adults expected to exercise autonomy in decision making. Despite widespread demographic changes since the 1970s that have contributed to an extended transition to adulthood (Patton et al. 2018), the legal transition from child to adult, as represented by the age of majority, has remained constant (Hamilton 2016). The conversion from minority to majority is a key social structure based on both perceived capacity at a given age, as well as social and economic need (Talburt & Lesko 2012).

For statistical purposes, and within legislative instruments, definitions of youth and adulthood are linked to chronological age. Worldwide the age of majority fluctuates and, historically, the age of majority has adjusted based on socio-historical context (Hamilton 2016). More than half of the countries around the world legislate the age of majority as 18 (UNICEF 2016; Matthews 2000) but there is some variability (United Nations 2016). Focusing on Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) countries, the age of majority is mostly 18 with exceptions including Canada (19 in some territories), Japan (20), Korea (19), New Zealand (20), and the United States (19 in some states) (OECD 2016, p. 1). In Tasmania, the age of majority reflects the global model of 18 years of age (Youth Justice Act 1997).

3.1.1 Minimum age

The age of majority confers full legal responsibility with adulthood, but adolescents gradually obtain legal freedom, such as getting a learner driver's license. In summary of these variations, the OECD (2016) outline three categories of minimum age:

Age at which individuals are considered to be adults	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Age of majority (age at which individuals are treated as an adult by the legal system)• Age of criminal responsibility (age at which individuals are liable for prosecution)• Minimum age for marriage
Age threshold related to end of schooling and start of employment	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• School leaving age (end of compulsory schooling)• Employment age (minimum age for employment)
Age at which individuals are permitted to engage in various risky and social behaviours	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Minimum age for drinking and purchasing alcohol• Minimum age for sexual consent

Table 1 Table adapted from: Organisation for Economic Co-Operation and Development (2016). Legal age thresholds regarding the transition from child to adulthood. OECD last updated December 2016, accessed March 16, 2023, via https://www.oecd.org/els/family/PF_1_8

3.1.2 Criminal responsibility

The age of criminal responsibility is an example of where adult legal responsibility occurs before an individual reaches the age of majority. While more than half of the countries around the world legislate the age of majority as 18 (UNICEF 2016), in the criminal justice system, the “legal minimum age legislation is contentious, contextual and contradictory” (UNICEF 2016), causing complexity for policy makers. Worldwide, the age of criminal responsibility varies (Matthews 2000), with a global average of 12.1 years (UNICEF 2016). For example, criminal responsibility is: 10 (England, New Zealand), 12 (Canada, Greece, Israel, Netherlands, and Turkey), 14 (Japan, Hungary, Slovenia, Austria). In Sweden and Norway, the age of criminal responsibility is 15, while in Luxembourg and Belgium it is 18 (Matthews 2000).

In Australia, zero tolerance policing and criminal justice approaches have emerged in various jurisdictions. In a context of heightened fear about youth violence, these approaches may alienate the people they implicate (Dwyer 2016). White (2013) identifies the preconditions of youth gangs and violence as ‘poverty, high levels of youth unemployment, precarious job markets, and ghettoization in our larger cities’ (White 2013, p. 177). He suggests that the issue is not about individualised problems: it is about social networks, structural conditions, economic circumstances and familial realities.

3.2 Economic participation

There has been a large-scale transformation of economies associated with the fourth industrial revolution, defined as an extension of the third (digital revolution) (Denny 2019). Although the extent of the revolutionary nature of this so-called 'Industry 4.0' is disputed, Schwab (2020) argues that economies are on the brink of technological influences that will fundamentally alter the way we live, work, and relate to one another. In Australia, job destruction is evident in industry sectors associated with the fourth industrial revolution, such as the replacement of jobs by automation and artificial intelligence (Denny 2019).

Young people are navigating new uncertainties around the future of employment and how emergent adults engage with the economy now has wider ramifications for the future of society (MacDonald 2009). In this section, we examine different facets of emergent adults' engagement with the economy: planning and committing to post-school pathways, experiences of precarity and unemployment, and financial planning.

3.2.1 Job readiness, career planning, and employment

Entering the labour market is an important shift in the transition to adulthood (Pollock 2008; Schoon & Heckhausen 2019). This transition includes securing income streams, establishing a career, and making financial decisions such as entering contracts and loans, or making investments. There are multiple important decisions involved concerning job and career planning, managing study, and pursuing a change in life circumstances (Schoon & Heckhausen 2019) as well as skills in job searching, self-regulation and resilience (van Hooft et al. 2021). In view of the complexities involved, Masdonati et al. (2022) highlight that "in Western societies, entering the labour market is one of the most demanding developmental tasks for emerging adults" (p. 19) and one which can have long-lasting impacts on careers and life trajectories. Further, working life trajectories may be more challenging for young people with mental health considerations (Bültmann et al. 2020). As Mortimer et al. (2016) noted:

Work is key to a successful transition to adulthood – providing the economic wherewithal for independent residence, marriage, and parenthood. If youth cannot achieve these objective markers of adulthood, cannot attain a sense of adult identity, and lose out on experiences that would help them develop a sense of self-efficacy and other psychological strengths that are needed for a successful transition, their future adult trajectories will likely be jeopardised. (p. 455).

Most transition policies in Australia focus on the point at which young people enter the labour market (White & Wyn 2004). This is due to the fact that the quality of this transition, such as whether it is delayed, turbulent, circuitous, or smooth, "critically affects adult social status attainment and developmental prospects throughout adulthood" (Schoon & Heckhausen 2019, p. 135). This policy focus exists in a changed landscape as compared to previous generations: the working lives of young people tend to start later due to more time spent gaining post-school qualifications (Mortimer 2009); they are likely to experience a non-linear and individualised career pathway (Furlong 2009; Mortimer 2009); in the industrialised world, there has been a decline in the availability of secure employment for young people who have completed compulsory education (Mortimer 2009); and, in OECD countries "a diploma is considered a minimum threshold for successfully entering the labour market" (Cohen-Scali et al. 2022, p. 54).

At the same time, young people are likely to start their casual work life early, often working part-time gigs alongside compulsory or post-school education (Mortimer 2009). In Australia, young people commonly combine work and study, which can be a significant source of stress (White & Wyn 2004).

3.2.2 Precarity and unemployment

Economic participation for young people under the age of 25 is increasingly fragmented and flexible (MacDonald 2009). Globally, structural changes to labour markets have precipitated the increase of informal labour markets and the decrease of secure employment opportunities. This situation has the effect of “inciting young people to accept low-quality jobs for their survival” (Masdonati et al. 2022 p. 19), with those aged 15-25 disproportionately vulnerable to accepting low-quality and low-paid work (Masdonati et al. 2022; Arnett et al. 2014). Those in precarious work situations often have “little means of resisting exploitive and oppressive labour conditions” (Cohen-Scali et al. 2022, p. 55), a situation that disproportionately affects emergent adults already experiencing socio-economic disadvantage, since they are at higher risk of entering precarious employment (Masdonati et al. 2022). Insecure work, such as temporary or seasonal work, contributes to a fragmented work life (Furlong 2009) which may affect self-esteem, confidence and independence (Butterbaugh et al. 2020). This is exacerbated by young people being not only at risk of prolonged under-employment or unemployment but being commonly criticised as being at fault of working too little (Inui 2009).

In Australia, the so called “death” of the full-time labour market for young people occurred following the restructuring of the economy and its labour market in the late 1980s, which led to a recession in the early 1990s (Denny & Churchill 2016). As stated above, the increase in flexible work has mostly affected young people, giving rise to new financial instability (Inui 2009). These factors are likely in play in the above average proportion of people aged 15-24 who live in poverty in Australia. The rate of poverty for all people in Australia in 2017-18 was 13.6% based on the 50% of median income poverty line, with 13.9% of 15–24-year-olds falling into this category (Australian Council of Social Services 2018).

The broader effects of casualisation of labour include the risk of financial marginalisation for young people, with periods of unemployment increasingly likely (Julkunen 2009; White & Wyn 2004). In many developed nations around the world, there are high rates of youth unemployment as well as underemployment for tertiary educated young people (Côté 2014). Emerging adults are exposed to “stagnation of wages, lack of opportunities, increased cost of education, increased likelihood to pursue higher education” (Wood et al. 2018, p. 123) and, more recently, the COVID-19 pandemic as well as ongoing stressors related to climate change.

3.2.3 Financial planning, cost of living, and welfare and income support

Establishing financial independence is a key component in the transition to adulthood (Butterbaugh et al. 2020). However, Butterbaugh et al. (2020) suggest emergent adulthood is also a period of peak financial stress as individuals embark on their economic trajectory, for which there is little vocational support or guidance to assist (Mortimer 2009). In Australia, this transition is further complicated by a decline in young people’s incomes in real terms from 2008 to 2018 (Productivity Commission 2020). In 2022, researchers found that one in eight people in Australia are living in poverty (where the poverty line is defined as 50 per cent of median after-tax household income, adjusted for household size) (ACOSS 2022). These statistics highlight a distinction between financial independence and financial well-being, with the former relating to a sense of competence in managing personal finances and the latter

as capacity to meet ongoing financial commitments (Butterbaugh et al. 2020 p. 36). Sinnewe & Nicholson (2023) identified that social context and exposure to financial hardship were primary influences on healthy financial habits, through which individuals were more effective at managing spending and saving for future goals.

Intergenerational support from family, particularly in the parent-child stem family, becomes volitional once the age of majority has been reached (Swartz & O'Brien 2016). Social and intergenerational changes have contributed to an increased reliance of young people on their parents that has extended and adjusted the transition to adulthood (Fingerman et al. 2020). Families with strong emotional attachments and more available resources may be better positioned to facilitate a smoother transition into adulthood for their children (Swartz and O'Brien 2016). This family function is most apparent in the advent of the 'bank of mum and dad' – increasingly a requirement for young people hoping to enter the housing market (Moor & Friedman 2021). In addition, there is a strong relationship between family financial socialisation and the financial planning and management behaviours of an emergent adult (Sorgente & Lanz 2017; LeBaron et al. 2020). Thus, the capacity and willingness of families to support emergent adults as well as family culture with regard to finances can either entrench disadvantage or promote upwards social mobility. Policies and services that support affordable housing may moderate the effect of family circumstances to some extent.

3.3 Material markers of independence

In the following, we describe how emergent adults transition from material dependency on caregivers to independent living. Material markers of independence include exercising financial agency through work, career planning, and independent living.

3.3.1 Independent living

Independent living is a key marker of adult autonomy (Juvonen 2014). Moving out from the family home brings both new freedoms and new responsibilities, signalling development in personal life management and agency (Juvonen 2014). However, despite global consistency as to the age most young people leave home, there is significant variation as to what age an individual achieves residential independence which is, in part, due to both national and international social and economic trends (Cobb-Clark 2008). For example, in Australia, the expansion of post-school educational opportunities combined with a weakening labour market has extended the transition to independent living for young people (Cobb-Clark 2008).

Nevertheless, independent housing is a key marker of adulthood (Juvonen 2014; Arundel & Lennartz 2017). The importance of leaving home is contextualised by culture (Cobb-Clark 2008); however, "in Western societies, the socio-cultural expectation today is that young people should approach adult-like independence and shoulder adult responsibilities in the sphere of housing as well as in other areas of their lives" (Juvonen 2014, p. 255). Arundel and Ronald (2016) observe:

Many demographers... fail to fully acknowledge the significance of housing; both its central role as a marker of adulthood and in housing's interrelated influence on other transition dimensions. Housing careers are clearly intertwined with family formation transitions, yet destandardization in housing pathways and how these vary across regional contexts is not well understood. (p. 887)

Around the world, decreasing housing affordability excludes many from achieving this key marker of independence. In developed countries, housing affordability is a growing issue in cities and urban contexts that risks entrenching intergenerational inequality (Moor & Friedman 2021). Observers are increasingly likely to refer to this trend as a crisis:

We have observed the dramatic escalation of house prices in many global cities around the world in the past decades. What is more serious is that these prices have risen faster than household incomes in some of these cities. As a result, growing numbers of residents in these cities – especially those with lower incomes – have had to pay higher shares of their income for their rented and purchased housing and thus experience a burgeoning housing affordability crisis. (Galster & Ok Lee 2021, p. 1).

Emergent adults are at risk of experiencing housing disadvantage. This is measured by “overcrowding, mortgage delinquency, housing mobility, housing tenure, subjective perceptions of inadequate housing, eviction, and physical housing conditions” (Singh et al. 2019, p. 262). Although this issue is becoming acute for many age-groups in Australia, younger people are more likely to be in unstable employment and unable to keep pace with aggressive housing prices (Paz-Pardo 2022; MacDonald 2009).

A systematic review of the evidence confirms that exposure to housing disadvantage may impact mental health later in life - that is, housing has a central role among the social determinants of mental health (Singh et al. 2019). Additionally, for youth who have engaged with the youth justice system or have complex mental health needs, securing housing is often more difficult (Skehan & Davis 2017). For emergent adults with extensive parental support networks, housing instability may encourage greater reliance on the family home, delaying important social and independence transitions as well as damaging self-efficacy (Fingerman et al. 2020. See further: Moor & Friedman 2021). This has also precipitated an increase in young adults transitioning in and out of the family home in response to economic and social pressures (Arundel & Lennartz 2017; Olofsson et al. 2020).

Permanent, or stable, housing is a fundamental foundation for participating in other elements of life, such as work or study and maintaining health and wellbeing (Juvonen 2014). There are clear longitudinal impacts of housing disadvantage (based on tenure, precarity, and physical characteristics) on mental health (Singh et al 2019). This is a critical issue affecting emergent adulthood in the Australian context.

3.3.2 Independent transport

Transport and autonomy are linked (Simons et al. 2014). Adulthood is characterised by being able to choose when and how to use transportation, whether for work, personal responsibilities, or play. Access to reliable commuter transport such as a personal car, bicycle, or public transport is essential to securing reliable income. Further, ability to travel to and from health and service provider appointments, or to travel for leisure, are expressions of adult decision-making capabilities. However, how emergent adults access transport depends on their living context (urban, regional) and the public transport available, as well as financial capacity to purchase and maintain, or hire, a private vehicle.

How emergent adults use transport is bound to the social and political context of the time (Krueger et al. 2020). Krueger et al. (2020) identify differences in transport usage between millennials and Generation X, with the former using private transport less and being more likely to use multimodal transport options. These changes are related to declining licensing rates among young people, lifestyle

preferences, as well as attempts to reduce financial pressures associated with transport (Krueger et al. 2020).

In the previous sections, we have defined emergent adulthood and described general characteristics and individual differences associated with this life phase. In the next section, we explore emergent adulthood in the context of current transition models globally, in Australia, and Tasmania.



Section summary

In this section, we discussed the factors that define emergent adults globally and in Australia. The legal age of majority may not always reflect the actual capabilities and needs of individuals.

Establishing financial stability, starting a career, and making sound financial decisions are critical aspects of the transition to adulthood. However, entering the labour market is one of the most challenging tasks for emerging adults, and the experience can have long-lasting effects on their careers and life trajectories.

Economic participation for young people is increasingly flexible and fragmented. Many young people start working part-time jobs alongside their compulsory or post-school education, and work can be a significant source of stress. Those in precarious work situations often have limited means of resisting exploitative and oppressive labour conditions. Continuous unemployment can also affect an individual's sense of confidence and independence.

This section also examined how emerging adults move from being financially dependent on caregivers to independent living. Independent living and independent transport are two critical indicators of independence. Independent living represents an important milestone of adulthood, demonstrating personal life management and agency, but it is becoming increasingly challenging due to escalating house prices and housing affordability crises. Exposure to housing disadvantage may also impact mental health later in life, making permanent or stable housing an essential foundation for participating in other areas of life. Independent transport is critical for accessing reliable income, healthcare, and other services and for leisure activities.

Conclusions and key points include:

- Transitions into the labour market present key opportunities for supporting emergent adults, also because these transitions are connected to other transition points such as independent living and transport. Avenues of support that are protective against exploitative and oppressive labour conditions are important.
- Rapid and ongoing changes to the labour market require supportive responses that are informed by contemporary evidence and real-world experience, particularly from young people themselves.

4 Transition models

This section explores key areas of transition for emergent adults, including post-school pathways, healthcare, and housing, as well as the socio-cultural context for these transitions. The analysis confirms the benefits of conceiving of emergent adulthood as a distinct phase. As discussed above, neuroscience shows that emergent adulthood is a life phase (Hochberg & Konner 2020; Patton et al. 2018; Arain et al. 2013), and that individuals develop at different rates that are not necessarily commensurate with legal frameworks of adulthood (Matthews 2000). Further, characteristics of emergent adults reflect individual differences and are sensitive to socio-cultural context. It should also be noted that unstructured pathways and transition points can negatively impact growth and development, as well as prolong the emergent adulthood phase (White & Wyn 2004; Fingerman et al. 2019). In recognition of these factors, there is a need for appropriate supports and pathways for youth transitioning to adulthood (Hochberg & Konner 2020; Sukhera et al. 2015). In particular, service systems can offer targeted support to emergent adults in developmentally appropriate ways throughout the transition to adulthood. In considering the roles of such service systems, it is also time to focus effort on participation rights. Discussions of adulthood and emergent adulthood often lack the voices of those transitioning through these life stages (see further: Tagliabue et al. 2016; Weier & Lee 2015).

In the following, we discuss the impact of socio-cultural context on the experiences of emergent adults, and then identify models of transition in the health system, and in the shift from schooling to employment or further study. It is important to note that much scholarly research on transitions focuses on specific cohorts, such as transitions for emergent adults with specific disabilities, or life contexts, such as transitioning from foster care to independent living. Here we are focused on general themes and issues.

4.1 Socio-cultural influences on adulthood and emergent adulthood

Definitions of youth and adulthood are bound by current social and cultural contexts, and so are reflective of broader financial, economic, and socio-cultural changes (Patton et al. 2018; Hill et al. 2015; White & Wyn 2004). The consideration of emergent adulthood as a life stage has occurred alongside demographic changes in industrialised nations (White & Wyn 2004; Côté 2014) that have had the effect of prolonging transitions to adulthood (Weier & Lee 2015). Such changes include increased opportunities for ongoing education, changes to employment (Wood et al. 2018), as well as delaying marriage and parenthood (Patton et al. 2018). In comparison with previous generations, 18–25-year-olds enjoy a wide range of opportunities through which to explore and shape their identities. Delaying adulthood is even seen by some youth as a positive identity marker (Côté 2014).

In noting tendencies such as the above, it is important to remember the dynamism within and between individual circumstances, such as cross-cultural particularities (see: Hill et al. 2015; Sica et al. 2018; Weier & Lee 2015). The concept of emerging adulthood shifts across social classes, and understanding what emerging adults need must “be grounded in a social, cultural, and historical context” (Arnett 2016, p. 227. See further: Macaulay & Deppeler 2022). Focusing on the socio-cultural context of adulthood in Western, post-industrial nations, Hamilton (2016) summarises the transition points for emergent adults in the United States:

Historians of society have identified five significant events that have, for more than a century, marked the transition from minority to adulthood for most young Americans. These have been: (1) marrying; (2) leaving their parents' homes; (3) establishing households of their own; (4) completing their educations or leaving school; and (5) entering the workforce. (p. 80-1)

However, these markers of transition do not necessarily reflect contemporary socio-cultural settings and may not reflect how young people view the transition to adulthood (Arnett 2000; Hamilton 2016). The focus on 'youth in transition' can overlook the "importance of young people's own subjectivities" (Goodwin & O'Connor 2009, p. 23). Using generation as an analytical tool, Wyn & Woodman (2006), draw attention to the influence of demographic change:

If we understand that the adulthood that was available to the Baby Boomer generation was a historical artefact, a product of a particular combination of economic realities, social policies and industrial settlements that have long since ceased to exist, it becomes possible to see what is missing from the conceptualisation of youth simply as transition. (Wyn & Woodman 2006, p. 498).

While this approach reduces the focus on transition as a linear process across the life course (Goodwin & O'Connor 2009), Goodwin and O'Connor (2009) counter that a generational view fails to account for individual subjectivities, as well as commonalities to young people across time. What Wyn & Woodman (2006) do offer, however, is the acknowledgement that previous notions of adulthood, and policy responses to adulthood, are timebound and are not necessarily transferrable to forthcoming cohorts of emergent adults (see further Heinz 2009). In view of discussion of temporality and individuality, it is useful to remember that emergent adults – like children – are human 'beings' as well as human 'becomings' (Uprichard 2008).

4.1.1 Technology and global citizenship

Advances in digital technology have transformed many aspects of society (Anderson et al. 2017). Emergent adults are at the vanguard of these changes: regularly using technology to exercise global citizenship. Global information flows connect young people across the world into cultural, social, and political movements and identities (Loader et al. 2014). Technology affords new opportunities for identity formation and global citizenship. That said, there is a commonly-held assumption among adults that young people are inherently more capable at accessing and navigating digital environments and managing associated challenges. Research shows that willingness to engage with and utilise technology – whether for work, social connection, or entertainment – is more related to the amount of exposure to technology than to age (e.g., Nguyen et al. 2022; van derKaay et al. 2012). Further, other demographic characteristics, such as gender, are implicated in responses to technology (Marchiori et al. 2018). Although young people may find adaptation to a world dominated by digital technologies easier than older adults, it is more informative to focus on the ways that technology is shaping the experience of emergent adults.

Technological developments promise opportunities for emergent adults, while also highlighting inequalities. Development in technology has changed the scope and frequency of both working and private life, with technological literacy now essential for full social and civic participation (Anderson et al. 2017). For emergent adults from families with limited contact with technology and/or those without

the means to pay for access, the ability to utilise technology and navigate digital information sources may exacerbate equity issues, with individuals experiencing barriers to a range of opportunities and services. For example, the digitalisation of government services and supports can exclude young people experiencing disadvantage from accessing these services due to the requirement of a smart phone and data (Humphry 2022).

Technology has carried the pandemic-induced shift towards working from anywhere and at any time, which intersects with changes to employment landscapes, such as the precarious gig economy (see section 3.2.2). The advent of the smart phone has contributed to increased social contact in online environments (Fingerman et al. 2020). However, the continual accessibility of smart phones has increased the risk of problematic internet use for young people, with emergent adults vulnerable to internet addiction, such as internet gaming disorders (Anderson et al. 2017). Social media use has also been linked with increases in cyber-bullying, with sometimes deleterious effects on the users' mental health (Craig et al. 2020) and family cohesion (Adams et al. 2019), as well as contributing to a sense of isolation (Primack et al. 2017).

Emergent adults need critical thinking skills that can assist with sorting and synthesising large swathes of information from multiple media and technology sources (Bakhtiar & te Riele 2019). At the same time, skills to identify misinformation and understand evidence vary significantly among all age-groups (Lyons et al. 2021). There is evidence to suggest that these skills can be learned (e.g., Roozenbeek & van der Linden 2019), which implies that factors such as explicit education and family experience with digital environments are important. This point highlights the potential for education initiatives to support emergent adults (and younger people) in navigating this complex environment.

4.1.2 Socio-cultural influences in the Australian and Tasmanian contexts

A recent report (2020) from the Office of the Commissioner for Children and Young People Tasmania focused on the wellbeing indicators of Tasmanian children and young people. The included data on safety, material basics, health, learning, participation, and culture and identity provides a perspective that acknowledges the overarching social and cultural factors that frame transition points for Tasmanian emerging adults. An overall picture of decreasing sense of safety, increasing poverty, pressures on mental health, and uneven education outcomes gives some context to the shifts and spread in transition points that can be observed. In Tasmania and in Australia more broadly, for example, young people are tending to remain in the parental home for longer. In the 2017-18 census, 75% of 15–24-year-olds were living in the family home as dependents, students or non-dependents, compared with 69% in the 2007-8 census (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare 2021). This situation coincides with a decrease in employment opportunities for young people that has occurred in the past decade, leading to more precarious employment and more frequent periods of unemployment (Chesters & Cuervo 2019). These figures align with global trends, as outlined in section 3.2.

The median age for marriage has remained stable across Australia since 2001 at approximately 31-32 years of age for males and 29-31 years of age for females (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2022). The rate for Tasmania is similar. There is research that suggests that people from higher socio-economic groups tend to marry later, but also that they are more likely to marry, so it is likely that the transition to committed relationships and marriage may vary across different social groups (Kalmijn 2013).

In Australia in 2021, around 80% of marriages were officiated by a civil celebrant, the same rate as for 2019 and 2021. In Tasmania in 2021, 87% of marriages were officiated by a civil celebrant (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2022). There is a likely relationship between the engagement of a civil celebrant and religious affiliation. Australian young people in particular exhibit diversity in matters of faith and spirituality and there is a downward trend in affiliation with organised religion (Singleton et al. 2018).

In the following, we discuss transition models to post-school pathways, to adult status in health systems, and in relation to housing.

4.2 Transition models to post-school pathways

The transition from school to working life, or study, is a major step for young people (Pollock 2008; Schoon & Heckhausen 2019), yet there is little research available which addresses transitional models of working life trajectories, and sequencing patterns in the labour market (Bültmann et al. 2020). Mortimer et al. (2016) argue that interventions targeting youth employment are essential, but these need to be focused towards addressing labour shortages as well as enhancing collaboration between schools and workplaces. However, Pollock (2008) and Bültmann et al. (2020) caution that models supporting post-school pathways are contextual, based on social structures specific to each nation.

The relationship between work and self-efficacy highlights the importance of work-transition counselling to supporting young people moving into the labour market (Mortimer et al. 2016). The school-to-work transition is supported differently in different societies, and there are nuances in different institutions (Schoon & Heckhausen 2019):

These pathways generate the main “action field” for young people to find their way in. Given pathways are partially age-graded, e.g. regarding variations in legal age of entering and leaving full-time education and paid employment, and are regulated by social institutions based on cultural beliefs and social norms about age-appropriate behavior, timing, and sequencing of social roles or status (Schoon & Heckhausen 2019 p. 138).

Schoon & Heckhausen (2019) summarise the literature to identify different school to work transition regimes around the world:

Regime	Common to	Features
The sub-protective transition regime	Spain, Portugal, Italy, Greece	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • High share of informal or insecure employment. • Lack of a social safety net. • Comprehensive education. • High rates of youth unemployment. • High rates of early school leaving. • Limited vocational training opportunities.
Universalistic transition regimes	Sweden, Norway, Finland	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Comprehensive education system. • Diverse post-compulsory school pathways to general and vocational education. • High investment into tertiary education. • Culture of combining tertiary or vocational study with work. • Regulated labour market with a strong public sector. • Career counselling is a feature of all stages of education and employment. • Young people can access social assistance from 18 years of age without means testing.
The liberal transition regime	UK, USA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Comprehensive education system. • High levels of fragmentation and flexibility in post-compulsory education. • Individualistic rather than collectivist. • Deregulated labour market with a large portion of jobs being low skilled or non-standard. • Vocational skills mostly tied to occupational skills. • Lower quality work-based training for adolescents including low acceptance of cultural apprenticeship pathway.
Employment-centered transition regimes	Germany, Austria, Switzerland	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Allocates young people to occupational careers early in school, with most young people channelled into a track by age 10. • Can fix an individual to a social and economic context. • Limited ability to switch tracks.

Table 2 Table adapted from pp. 139 of Schoon, I., Heckhausen, J. *Conceptualizing Individual Agency in the Transition from School to Work: A Social-Ecological Developmental Perspective*. *Adolescent Res Rev* 4, 135–148 (2019). <https://doi.org/10.1007/s40894>

4.2.1 Post-school transition models in Australia and Tasmania

In Australia, numerous programs exist to support transitions from school to further study, Vocational Education and Training (VET), or work. In Tasmania, programs designed to support transitions to further study exist within a context of persistently lower academic achievement among older students (years 7 and 9) (Commissioner for Children and Young People 2018; Steering Committee for the Review of Government Services 2022). The proportion of school leavers aged 17-24 participating in education and training and/or employment is an indicator of the success of the post-school transition. Australia-wide, participation in education or training is significantly higher for young people who complete year 12 (Steering Committee for the Review of Government Services 2022). In Tasmania, participation rates tend to be lower for school leavers in this age bracket. For example, the percentage of school leavers aged 17-24 fully participating in education, training and/or employment in 2021 was 62.4% in Tasmania as compared with the national average of 73.9% (Steering Committee for the Review of Government Services 2022). In 2022, these figures improved to 77% for Tasmania and 82.2% Australia-wide (Australian Bureau of Statistics (2022).

To support post-school participation rates, in 2020, the Tasmanian State Government reformed the Education Act, raising the age of education and training leave requirements. In effect, students must either complete Year 12, attain a Certificate III or turn 18 years of age (whichever comes first) (DECYP 2020). In addition, Tasmanian programs supporting transition to higher education, such as the Schools Recommendation Program and the University Connections Program, have been implemented. The Youth Navigators initiative was aimed at supported school leavers transition to further education and training (Department of Premier and Cabinet (DPAC) 2021). Programs to support VET pathways are implemented in schools, such as Workplace learning, and enable students to begin their post-school qualifications while completing year 11 and/or 12. These final years of schooling – previously only accessible through a College – are now offered by all High Schools in Tasmania. This ensures that Tasmanian students enjoy a range of supported options for the transition from school to their chosen pathways, with further services initiated by bodies such as the Youth Network of Tasmania and the Youth Jobs PaTH provided by the Tasmanian Government.

4.3 Transition models in health

At the age of majority, an emergent adult is still psychologically and physically developing. However, health services shift from child and adolescent services to adult services at this time. Research has explored how to support transitions of young people with chronic health care conditions to the adult health care system (Betz et al. 2018), but there is scope to expand models of health care transition to young people more generally.

There can be multiple barriers for emergent adults when accessing healthcare. In a study into the experiences of emergent adults accessing healthcare in Sweden, Viktorsson et al. (2022) identified young people worry about being taken seriously by healthcare professionals, and that initial experiences tend to influence later engagement with the healthcare system. Further, Viktorsson et al. (2022) explained that “social and economic forces, lack of work opportunities, and increased costs for independent living” (p. 2) mediate how an individual accesses and engages with the healthcare system. Additional challenges include “changing relationships, accessing adult practitioners, gaining funding, negative beliefs about adult care, lack of knowledge about the transition process and lack of self-

management skills” (Anderson et al. 2021, p. 448). For young people with chronic health conditions, “the transition from paediatric (child) to adult health services is often associated with deterioration in their health” (Campbell et al. 2016, p. 1).

Despite increased scholarly review of the effectiveness of health transition models, there is a lack of evidence firstly, to identify best practice and, secondly, to ensure that best practice is contextualised by the needs and capacities of young people (Anderson et al. 2021). The United Kingdom *National Institute for Health and Care Excellence* (NICE) emphasise “that the transition is the responsibility of *both* child and adult services but should also involve the young person and their parents or carers (cited in Anderson et al. 2021 p. 447. See further: NICE 2016), with more effective programs commencing the transition from the age of 14 and concluding when the patient reaches the age of majority (Yassaee et al. 2019). Betz et al. (2017) recommend a three stage Health Care Transition model (HCT) characterised by pre-transfer of care, the transfer, and post-transfer support (p. 161). This model tends to commence in early adolescence, involves parents and carers, and is bio-socially age appropriate (Betz 2017, p. 161).

4.3.1 Health care transition models in Australia and Tasmania

In Australia, the transition to the adult health system has two key steps. First, when a person turns 14, they are in control of their medical records. However, their care still falls within the paediatric system. Then, when a person reaches the age of majority, they are legally in control of their healthcare and “many young adults have to confront their first healthcare experience without an adult advocate” (Viktorsson et al. 2022, p. 2). This requires that the young person self-direct their care, organise and access appointments, plan for appointment costs (including accessing benefits such as Medicare or private health insurance), and manage medications or ongoing treatment. The transition to adult healthcare services can be more challenging for young people with long-term health challenges, with experiences of additional difficulties often needing strong support networks (Rasalingam et al. 2021).

The National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) is an important element of healthcare in Australia. The NDIS provides funding to support people aged 7-65 who live with a disability. Younger children are supported through the ‘early childhood approach’ (NDIS 2022). Upon reaching the age of majority, young people assume control over NDIS support wherever possible. The NDIS is recognised as “one of the most important social reforms in Australian history” (Department of Social Services 2023). However, issues of access and necessary supports for individuals who may benefit from NDIS funding are subject to ongoing scrutiny, particularly where psycho-social disabilities are present (e.g., Mellifont & Hancock, 2022; Williams & Smith, 2021). In the United States, Taylor et al. (2022) examined the feasibility of a national pilot scheme, ASSIST, to upskill parents and carers with the intention of improving service access for young people with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) transitioning to adulthood. While directed at helping parents and carers in learning how to navigate the adult support service system, such involvement of parents and carers offers an alternative transition model. That said, this approach is not supportive of young people who do not have access to family support.

In the Tasmanian context, there are issues that are of particular concern in terms of transition support. For example, the rate of pregnancy among women aged 15 to 19 years (16.2 per 1000) is higher than the national average (10.5 per 1000) (Commissioner for Children and Young People 2018). Although becoming a young parent can be a highly positive experience, becoming pregnant before the age of 20 is also associated with adverse outcomes for young mothers and their child. Apart from coping with the

demands of parenthood, young mothers are less likely to complete their education and are more likely to be unemployed or to earn lower incomes (Gaudie et al. 2010; Marino et al. 2016).

4.3.2 Mental health care transitions

For emergent adults, transitional mental health care can be uneven (Paul et al. 2015). There are high rates of attrition from services by youth who suddenly find themselves in the adult service system (Skehan & Davis 2017) and there is a decline in mental health service utilisation for young people between the ages of 17 and 19 (Sukhera et al. 2015. See further Skehan & Davis 2017). Further, “many young adults ... face a daunting transition from youth friendly approaches to adult systems of mental health care” (Sukhera et al. 2015, p. 271). Key barriers include: a lack of continuity of support, stigma, cultural factors, ambivalence, and under-diagnosing symptoms (Skehan & Davis 2017). Supporting this transition point is especially important when considering the experiences of young people with chronic mental health concerns:

Many of these youths have emotional disturbances that hamper psychosocial development leaving them less prepared than others to take on the autonomy required of patients in the adult mental health system. (Sukhera et al. 2015, p. 271).

Additionally, youth may be experiencing complex disadvantage and socio-economic pressures, such as poverty, or have limited familial support. These and other factors complicate these emergent adults’ capacity to access support services (Skehan & Davis 2017). In response to these concerns, Skehan and Davis (2017) argue for the implementation of developmentally appropriate supports that aim to help individuals become more autonomous in mature adulthood (p. 177).

There is no agreed model of transition for mental health services, in part because of the differences in context within and between services and service systems (Sukhera et al. 2015). However, While et al. (2004) identify four approaches to managing transition models in healthcare, each aimed at addressing a different perspective: direct (communication and information sharing); sequential (including the development of new services); developmental (skill training and support system development); and professional (transfer of expertise only).

Mental health care transition models are broadly conceived of in two categories: age continuum and shared management (Sukhera et al. 2015). Examples of age continuum transition models in Australia include headspace and Youth Health. These bodies provide essential and accessible services. However, there is a risk that, rather than bridging the youth to adult transition, this design creates two new transition cliffs: one at the age of 12 (or 15) and another at the age of 25 (McGorry 2007).

Shared management is most commonly used to support youth with chronic conditions. In this model, allied health professionals are either trained in both paediatric and adult health care, or a health care plan engages with both paediatric and adult health care providers. This may be useful for youth already in contact with the youth mental health service system (Sukhera et al. 2015). For example, in the United States, the *Now is the Times – Healthy Transitions* federally funded mental health program is aimed at continuing support for young people transitioning to adulthood (Skehan & Davis 2017).

In Tasmania, young people – particularly those living regionally – can face barriers to accessing mental health care, including attending service locations, transport, and wait times that are exacerbated by young people being obliged to ‘retell’ their story throughout often repetitious administration processes

(Bridgman et al. 2019). At the same time, suicide rates of children and young people are high in the state at 3.1 per 100,000 as compared to the national average of 2.7 per 100,000 (Commissioner for Children and Young People 2018).

4.4 Transition models in the housing system

Much of the available literature on supporting emergent adults in the housing system focuses on assisting transitions for specific cohorts of young people, such as emergent adults experiencing homelessness (Semborski et al. 2021), experiences of young people with disability (Jevne et al. 2022), or emergent adults leaving care (Sulimani-Aidan 2019), rather than addressing general ways of supporting the transition to independent living.

Broadly, transitions to independent living are highly individualised and context driven and are vulnerable to national and global economic climates (Arundel & Ronald 2016; McKee 2012). Transitions to independent living are often ‘fuzzy’ (Pollock 2008) and may no longer reflect a ‘ladder’ of transition (Arundel & Ronald 2016, p. 888-9). However, the transition commonly begins with ‘renting’ (Arundel & Ronald 2016) and home ownership is increasingly delayed (Moor & Friedman 2021).

Globally, increasing financial pressures for housing and cost of living have contributed to an informal transitional model of extended reliance on parental support in the move to independent living (Olofsson et al. 2020; Moor & Friedman 2021; Arundel & Ronald 2016; Arundel & Lennartz 2017). The likelihood of young people moving in and out of the parental home increases in times of economic insecurity, such as the global recession, and can have ongoing implications for adult independence and self-efficacy (Olofsson et al. 2020; Arundel & Lennartz 2017). The second informal transitional model is the growing reliance on the ‘bank of mum and dad’ to enter the housing market, which risks entrenching economic advantage and disadvantage (Moor & Friedman 2021). While there may be positive reasons why a young person transitions back to the family home, such as saving money, it can also represent an unwanted life course reversal (Olofsson et al. 2020).

Transitions to independent living depend on the specific welfare regime of a given nation state, which, in turn, dictates how young people engage with state and/or family support (Arundel & Ronald 2016). In a review into housing support systems in Europe, Arundel & Ronald (2016) identify different systemic factors which affect transitions to housing: “accessibility and availability of social or public housing, subsidized rent schemes and regulation...market supply mechanisms, demand, pricing, and access to mortgage credits” (p. 890). Important too, is the regulation of the rental market (Arundel & Ronald 2016). The following table is a summary of the investigation by Arundel & Ronald (2016) of different housing welfare regimes and how they influence transitions to independent living. It is worth noting that Olofsson et al. (2020) observe the Swedish social democratic model offers “better preconditions for young adults to have an independent housing career compared to many other European countries”, resulting in fewer returns to home (p. 924):

Regime	Common to	Features
Social democratic	Denmark, Finland, Sweden	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Universalistic entitlements. • Orientation towards individualism. • Cultural value of early-home leaving. • Public housing availability (lower rates of shared housing).
Liberal	UK, Anglo-Saxon countries	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Welfare provision is needs tested. • Orientation towards individualism. • Guided by market forces. • Cultural norm of earlier home leaving. • Fewer protections against economic and labour uncertainty.
Conservative	Germany, France, Belgium, Netherlands	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Status based provision of benefits. • Orientation towards family. • Later home leaving. • Culture of co-residence and semi-dependent living. • Strong vocational employment opportunities.
Southern European	Greece, Italy, Spain, Portugal	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strong family ties (kinship support). • Low provision of state welfare support. • Delayed home leaving. • Job and income insecurity. • Higher likelihood of shared living.

Table 3 Table adapted from p. 894-898 of Arundel, A., Ronald, R. (2016) Parental co-residence, shared living and emerging adulthood in Europe: semi-dependent housing across welfare regime and housing system contexts, *Journal of Youth Studies*, 19:7, 885-905, DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1080/13676261.2015.1112884>.

4.4.1 Housing transition models

In most countries, social housing as a proportion of housing stock has declined since the 1980s (Morris et al. 2023). In Australia, social housing scarcity is evident across jurisdictions. Further, systems and practices to register for housing support vary across jurisdictions. In Tasmania in 2016/17, 22.9 young people per 10,000 estimated resident population presented alone to specialist homelessness services, which is above the national average (Commissioner for Children and Young People 2018). An exacerbating factor in this lies in the fact that, in 2017, Hobart became the least affordable Australian capital city under the Rental Affordability Index measure (Commissioner for Children and Young People 2018). Support for young people facing housing difficulties exists in programs such as Anglicare's Youth2Independence (Y2I), Colony 47 or Homes Tasmania – Housing Connect. Among these programs, Y2I includes provision of accommodation for 16–24-year-olds in conjunction with strengths-based

support in committing to learning and developing skills and capabilities across six areas: education; employment; health and wellbeing; housing and living skills; community participation; and social connections. This approach highlights awareness of the importance of addressing multiple aspects of the transition into adulthood, including developing social networks (Goyette 2019; Sulimani-Aidan 2017).

In the Australian context, selected findings from the Household, Income and Labour Dynamics in Australia (HILDA) Survey, *In Australia* (2022), across all age groups, indicates an increase in the share of young adults living with their parents from 2002 to 2020, with the exception of the 22 to 25 age group for both men and women between 2019 and 2020, and women aged 26 to 29 between 2008 and 2019, (Wilkins et al. 2022). Wilkins et al. (2022) note that the average age young adults leave the family home has thus been trending upwards, albeit it with considerable year-to-year fluctuations.

Section summary

This section discussed Australian and international transition models, focusing on the key areas of post-school pathways, healthcare, and housing. The analysis highlights the benefits of recognising emergent adults as a distinct group and acknowledging that individuals develop at different rates that may not align with legal frameworks of adulthood. Pathways and transition points that are unstructured can negatively impact growth and development and prolong the emergent adulthood phase, so appropriate supports are needed to aid the transition to adulthood.

In Australia, there are numerous programs designed to support transitions from school to further study, Vocational Education and Training (VET), or work. Tasmania has lower academic achievement and lower participation rates in further education or work compared to the national average. However, there are strong programs to support transition to higher education and VET pathways, such as the Schools Recommendation Program and workplace learning.

Young people transitioning from paediatric to adult health care may face significant challenges, including changes in their health care needs, routines, and relationships with health care professionals.

Finally, the section discussed transition models in the housing system for emergent adults. Increasing financial pressures for housing and cost of living have contributed to an informal transitional model of extended reliance on parental support, including periodically returning to the family home in response to economic pressures and reliance on the 'bank of mum and dad'. Transitions depend on the specific welfare regime of a locality, with a scarcity of social housing evident in many jurisdictions.

Conclusions and key points for section 4 include:

- Recognising emergent adulthood as a distinct life phase benefits structured and targeted approaches to transitional policy and systems development.
- Economic and demographic pressures play a significant role in emergent adult transitions. Changes such as extended reliance on parental support and limited affordable housing availability are significant considerations.
- Access to and skills around digital technologies are important, including identifying misinformation and ensuring capacity to engage with digital systems.
- Post-school pathways are relatively well-supported, particularly considering the demographic and geographic challenges faced in Tasmania's education system.
- There is scope for developing collaborative initiatives to support healthcare transitions that include young people and parents and carers.

5 Conclusion

This review of the literature synthesises multi-disciplinary contributions to policy, practice and research concerning emergent adulthood. It draws from the fields of sociology, education, social work, criminology, political science, health, social policy, behavioural insights, and anthropology.

In the first section, the analysis summarises key terms in the literature and articulates contemporary understandings of the concept of emergent adulthood. Pollock (2008) describes emergent adulthood as a 'fuzzy' time. There is not a clear physical, intellectual, social, or economic marker of 'adulthood'. Indeed, during this phase of life identity formation itself is dynamic and involves identity explorations (Arnett & Mitra 2018). There is, however, consensus in the literature that emergent adulthood is a distinct phase that is achieved gradually although not in a linear path.

The second section of the review highlights that emergent adulthood is a critical "age of opportunity" that sets the scene for future life trajectory including possible life outcomes. Emergent adults are different from adults, but their differences should be viewed as part of successive stages of development, and subject to individual context. Behavioural science has expanded our understanding of emergent adulthood, deepening an appreciation of individual influences and situational factors.

In section three, the legal, material, and economic markers of adulthood related to attaining age of majority and achieving independence are considered. There are complex and interdependent factors which shape experiences of job readiness, career planning, employment, and independent living for the emergent adult. In a world dynamic where precarity, unemployment and cost of living pressures influence broader wellbeing outcomes, it is critical that emergent adults are supported throughout this pivotal developmental phase.

Section four sets out key areas of transition for emergent adults. Based on discussions with YNOT, we confined our scope to four sub-themes. The first of these identifies sociocultural and technological influences on emergent adults, while the final three focus on important transition points: post-school transition models, health and mental health, and housing. The limitations of our approach stem from the constraints of time and the broad scope of the topic. Flexibility is evident in our approach to snowballing and engagement with the literature. We acknowledge that due to these limitations we may have missed important work.

Distilling the literature, a central contention emerges – there is a need to empower emergent adult's participation in the co-design of the policies and service systems with which they are interacting. Such an approach is supportive of civic participation. Equally importantly, participation ensures that young people have influence in measures that impact them, and that the perspectives of young people are taken into account.

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